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ABSTRACT

This historical study examines the perceptions of teachers involved in the initial desegregation of the East Baton Rouge Parish Public School System, Louisiana, in 1970, when over 600 African American and white teachers began teaching in schools that were predominantly another race (cross-over). The study also examines the impact of cross-over on classroom teaching, highlighting the experiences through oral narrative from two cross-over teachers in the district: an African American man who transferred to a previously all white high school and a white woman who began teaching in a previously all African American high school. Both are still teaching in the district. The narratives were gathered under a set of common themes and included their thoughts on the cross-over; prior preparation for it; experiences during the first few days; relations with school administrators, students, and teachers; reactions of family and friends; experiences in the community; advantages and disadvantages of the cross-over; and current thoughts on the long-term efforts to integrate district schools. The teachers noted a desire to be part of the cross-over, though it was difficult. Part of the impact of the cross-over was teachers working harder in the classroom, mainly due to teachers' perceptions of racial attitudes and expectations. Both teachers believed that desegregation has fallen far short of their expectations. (SM)

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The Desegregation Experience of Public School Personnel in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

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The Desegregation Experience of Public School Personnel in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana

Introduction

The Fall of 1970 marked an important change the East Baton Rouge Parish Public School System. In 1970, the number of students attending at least partially desegregated schools rose from 3,000 to over 40,000. In addition, for the first time, school personnel, busses, and extra curricular activities were desegregated. As a part of this remarkable change, at the beginning of the 1970-1971 school year, over 600 teachers, both African American and White, began teaching in schools that were predominantly another race. This event is known as the "cross-over" and these teachers are known as "cross-over" teachers.

This historical study focuses on two specific questions: (1) the perceptions of teachers during the cross-over; and (2) the impact of the cross-over on classroom teaching. This paper highlights the experiences through oral narrative of two cross-over teachers who taught in the East Baton Rouge School System during the first year of district wide cross-over. These two teachers are an African American man who transferred in 1970 to a previously all White high school, and a White women who began her teaching career in 1970 in a previously all African American high school. Both teachers are still currently working in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. The narratives of these two teachers are used as a means for a detailed comparison and contrasting of experiences of two teachers from different socio-cultural backgrounds.

What follows are two stories out of thousands that could be told. No claim is made here that they are in any way more significant accounts than those that could be told by other

individuals involved in the cross-over. However, a claim is made that these individuals are representative and typical of cross-over teachers who taught in the East Baton Rouge School System during desegregation. Both teachers have long teaching careers in the district, were willing to discuss their experiences openly, expressed trust in the fair reporting of their narratives, and wished to contribute to and support this research project.

Both teachers were selected based on their ability to speak to the research questions. In addition, the desire to limit the number of interviewees makes it impossible to cover the many experiences of teachers during the cross-over. The purpose here is to examine the recalled experiences of two typical cross-over teachers in as much specific detail and depth as possible to further understanding of urban desegregation in a mid-sized southern city.

The stories of the two teachers will be told using their own words. Each story will begin with a brief biographical sketch of the individual, followed by a contextual description of the school in which the individual worked and taught during the cross-over. Included in this description are brief histories of the schools in which the respondents worked. The narratives are gathered under a set of common themes for comparison purposes, and include the interviewees early thoughts and perceptions of the cross-over, prior preparation for the cross-over, experiences during the first few days of the cross-over, relations with school administrators, relations with students, relations with other teachers, reaction of family and friends, experiences in the Baton Rouge community, thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of the cross-over, and current thoughts on the long term efforts to integrate East Baton Rouge Public Schools.

Freddie Millican

Mr. Freddie Millican is an African American who has been teaching in the East Baton Rouge School System since 1965. During his thirty-three years in the school system, Mr. Millican has taught English at McKinley High School and at Istrouma High School. Currently, he is the Dean of Students at Broodmoor Middle School. Mr. Millican was born and raised in East Baton Rouge Parish in the town of Zachary, Louisiana, ten miles north of Baton Rouge. He attended the now closed Northwestern High School, graduating in 1957. After graduating from high school, Mr. Millican attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, spent several years in the military, then returned to Southern University, where he in 1965 graduated with a degree in education.

Mr. Millican pursued a higher education and became a teacher as a way out of a life of common laborer. According to Mr. Millican (1999a), a love of learning and respect for teachers combined with a lack of opportunities for educated African Americans made teaching an easy career choice:

> Back in 1957 when I graduated, and in 1955-56 when I was in high school, I would imagine that there really wasn't a great deal of experiences that I could have gone into. Many of the plants like Exxon, and the other corporations, they were beginning to downsize. A lot of people were working at those plants, but they were doing basically common labor. I saw teaching as a way of earning a living without having to do common labor, and that is probably one of the reasons I went into teaching. Then, I always enjoyed school, and being around school and some of my role models were teachers. Some of the people I knew were teachers. Probably that was my motivation for becoming a teacher.

Upon completing his degree at Southern University, Mr. Millican began his professional career as an educator. Mr. Millican's first teaching job was as an English teacher at McKinley High School, formerly known as the McKinley Colored High School. McKinley, opened in 1924

and was one of the first African American High Schools in the South. The school had earned a reputation by 1965 for being a high quality school. The réputation of McKinley High School was such that it not only served students from East Baton Rouge Parish, but also from all across the state of Louisiana. McKinley High School remained a school with all African American students up until the 1970 cross-over. However, Mr. Millican (1999a) recalls that there were two White teachers at the school prior to 1970.

Mr. Millican speaks with pride about his opportunity to teach at McKinley High School. In addition, Mr. Millican (1999a) reflects on an attitude that reflects a culture of excellence at McKinley High School:

> Most of my older sisters and brothers and people I know went to McKinley. I was proud to be an instructor at McKinley -- proud of the tradition that McKinley had and proud to be down there. I enjoyed my five years at McKinley. Of course, it was a school where everybody was one race. All of us were Black, and all of the students were Black. And I will tell you what, back in those days there was a sort of motivation among the teachers to strive for excellence in all of the academics. In other words, we realized on the faculty at McKinley that we had young boys and young girls that had to go out and compete among a whole different nationality of people -- the whole mirage of American society. We tried to instill in these people the idea that because they were in a school like McKinley, because they were in a one race school, that we had to run faster. And so, we taught hard, and we stayed on them academically, trying to produce an excellent product, a top rated student when they graduated from high school. This was our motivation at McKinley, and I enjoyed that.

Mr. Millican taught at McKinley for five years before he was selected to be one of the cross-over teachers. He was not asked if he wanted to be transferred to a different school. He was given a form and told to list in order of preference the three White high schools that he would prefer.

Because of the demographics of the East Baton Rouge School System, African American schools lost a much higher percent (65%) of their faculties than the White schools (35%). This policy was developed by the bi-racial committee and approved by the courts, however, from his

comments it is clear that Mr. Millican, as well as many members of the African American community, were unaware of the reasons. A common feeling was that the policy was a deliberate attempt to destroy historically African American schools:

> There were many ideas being passed among the people and the teachers back in those days. Some thought that they were robbing the Black schools of all of the excellent teachers. That was the prevailing idea, that they would get all of the good teachers out of the schools like McKinley and Capitol and Northwestern and send them to the White schools. So that was one idea that people said -- that our schools would be robbed of all the talent. (Millican, 1999a)

When asked if he thought there might be some truth to the notion that desegregation was robbing the African American schools of their excellent teachers, Mr. Millican (1999b) responded: "Could be, yeah, yeah. There very well could have been." Mr. Millican was certain, however, that the African American schools lost many excellent teachers.

Mr. Millican (1999a) believes that school desegregation was necessary and a good thing. However, he expressed some anxiety: "We didn't know where we were going or what school you would end up at, or whether you were going to some hostile environment where you probably would face firing in six weeks." Regardless of the apprehension felt by many African American teachers, Mr. Millican claims that most teachers did want to break the racial segregation of schools:

> We looked at integration as something new and something that we wanted, and I guess that it was a challenge to us. We knew we were going into new schools, that we were going into better schools. All of us had always heard that the grass was greener on the other side. We grew up in Baton Rouge hearing about Istrouma High, and Baton Rouge High, and Broadmoor High, and all of these schools. We would pass the stadium back in the old days of segregation when the stadium had fifteen to twenty-thousand people in it from Baton Rouge High. We knew they were living the good life in sports, and the good life in academics, and the good life in education. And so we looked forward to going over and being a part of that. So, I don't know of anybody who looked back and said "We

> don't want to go." Most people wanted to go and wanted to be a part of this new experience in Baton Rouge.

Before the end of the school year in 1970, Mr. Millican was told he would be teaching the upcoming fall at Istrouma High School.

Along with Baton Rouge High School, Istrouma was the pride of the East Baton Rouge School System. The recently built school was a model facility. The gymnasium was the largest in the school system. The school included a two-thousand-seat state-of-the-art auditorium. Istrouma High School had a reputation of academic and athletic excellence that was statewide, and even nationwide.

Mr. Millican attended a seminar for cross-over teachers at LSU just prior to crossing over to Istrouma High School. He (Millican, 1999a) remembers it as "like a pep rally." The remarkable aspect of the event for Mr. Millican was that it allowed White and Black teachers in Baton Rouge to meet and talk together for the first time in a large professional gathering. It was an exciting time for both Black and White teachers according to Mr. Millican (1999a).

Mr. Millican still recalls his first day as a teacher at Istrouma High School. His recollection of meeting with the principal on that day is remarkable because it illustrates deeply held attitudes about race. Mr. Millican (1999a) recalls that cross-over teachers were abruptly confronted with racial attitudes by school officials:

> Yeah, I can remember the very first day that I went to Istrouma High School. The principal then was "Little Fuzzy" Brown, you have probably heard of him. "Little Fuzzy" was the principal at Istrouma then, and I went in and I sat behind this big huge desk. "Little Fuzz" was sitting behind the desk, and he said, "Hello, where you coming from?" I said, "I am coming from McKinley." He said, "You're coming from McKinley?" And his next remark was, "You all think you are better than us over there." That was his remark, "You all think you are better than us over there." And I swear I was surprised as I don't know what to hear him make that remark. You know, to say that, here we had admired

> Istrouma and admired all of these other schools, and here he is one of the top administrators in the Baton Rouge area saying that we think that we are better than they are.

Although this remark clearly seems to be intended as an effort ofintimidation by his new principal, Mr. Millican searches for other explanations.

What emerges from this explanation is a discussion of the qualities of McKinley High School. Mr. Millican ponders why the principal might think that people from McKinley would think themselves superior. This concern is revealed by a further discussion of the quality and reputation of McKinley:

> You know, my being raised in Zachary, in the country like, I didn't realize how important McKinley was. But McKinley is one of the top-notch schools I learned later in the whole state of Louisiana and in the nation. And not only Blacks, but Whites looked up to McKinley too. That is probably why he made that remark -- that we thought we were better than them over there. So, when "Little Fuzz" made that remark, I really was surprised. But then I looked back at McKinley, and I realized how many of the teachers at McKinley, even though they had gotten their B.S. degrees from Southern, and Grambling and Leeland College up in Baker, many of them had gone to New York and gotten masters degrees -- had gone over to New York and California -- and I think our principal had a masters degree from Southern Cal. So they were very, very academically oriented people who had gone back and bettered themselves educationally. Of course, Mr. Brown probably was aware of this -- more so than we were. (Millican, 1999)

This explanation is followed with the comment about Mr. Brown that, "He was a very nice fellow."

Mr. Millican describes this type of intimidation as going on for years. African American teachers crossing over into Istrouma High School were overtly and subtly reminded that they were outsiders in someone else's school. In one case, Mr. Millican reports that a cross-over guidance counselor was not given an office and forced to move from room to room.

On top of this, perhaps the most direct intimidation was through the use of language that would separate and belittle the African American teachers. Mr. Millican (1999a) describes a clear example of this type of put-down through the selective use of terms to label African American teachers:

> One thing about Mr. Brown, he never did refer to us (African American cross-over teachers) as just teachers. We were always "beginning teachers." He never did. Whenever we were in faculty meetings with all of the other faculty, he would always make a remark, and then he would say, "Now you beginning teachers," talking to us. The two years that he was there, the two or three years after the cross-over, he always referred to us as "beginning teachers." I always wondered why we were never just considered a part of the faculty. We were always "beginning teachers." And of course, you know that was some kind of put down, I guess.

Clearly, it was a put down, however, Mr. Millican places and describes Principal Brown in the context of his perception of the times. The principal is not viewed by his actions alone; but, he is compared to Mr. Millican's (1999a) idea of White cultural norms:

> But, other than that he was a pretty fair man. If I had to rate Mr. Brown, I would have to say he was a pretty fair guy, depending on the circumstances that he lived under and the year it was and all of that.

Comparatively, the principal is remembered as a "fair man."

African American cross-over teachers in 1970 believed they had to be careful with everything they did. This was particularly true with their use of language. African American teachers would often be required to use the "proper" form of English. African American cross-over teachers believed they needed to be both careful and artificial about their use of language. There was the impression that they needed to speak in manner that was acceptable to the dominant culture. As described by Mr. Millican (1999b), failure in this area could result in the shame of removal from the school:

> I remember an incident at Istrouma when some of the White administrators would always check notes that the Black teachers would write to see if it was grammatically correct. And then sometimes if they would find a grammatical error, they would call them in and talk to them about it. So, I remember the word going around that whenever you write a note to make sure it was grammatical because the principal might get it. And then there were some teachers, I remember this teacher who -- they would come into your classroom and if you didn't speak a certain way, the king's language exactly like they wanted you to speak -- some teachers were called. In fact, I remember one guy who came to me, and he said that he was transferred from the school because of the way that he talked. Not because of his academic ability nor because of his ability to handle the subject matter, but because of his delivery.

From this quote, the question immediately comes to mind, was the improper use of language the only reason this teacher was transferred? The specific answer, however, is not the issue of interest. What is important, is that Mr. Millican and other cross-over teachers perceived that their common use of language was somehow unacceptable to the leaders of the school.

While Freddie Millican and other cross-over teachers had to deal with the racial attitudes of administrators, they also had to face similar attitudes among their students. Istrouma High School began admitting African American students in the Fall of 1963 under a "freedom of choice" plan. Under this plan, however, the numbers of African American students remained small. By the time Mr. Millican crossed over in 1970, there were still less than one-hundred African American students in the school. Thus, at Istrouma High School following the cross-over, Mr. Millican was assigned classes that were predominantly White. According to Mr. Millican (199b), this challenge was faced with preparation.

> One thing I noticed about the classes, you had to be on your toes when you went to teach. You had to be doubly prepared because for some reason the White students felt that they wanted to test your knowledge. They would always ask you to explain something more than the normal. And they would always trying to catch you on something. I can remember they were always saying, "Look there. Mr. Millican, you didn't do this," or whatever. "What about this, Mr. Millican?" So when you made your lesson plan, you had to make sure that you were really, really sharp on what you were teaching -- on your

> subject matter. And, of course, all of us were, we were sharp on that. Because like I told you, back in the Black schools, we put a priority on being academically prepared because we knew that our kids had to compete against -- you know what I said already. So we were ready to teach, and the academic part of it wasn't really hard. But they would be ready to test you and ask you questions and make sure that you knew what you were talking about. But then that passed after two or three years. They learned that you knew what you were talking about, and that you were not a dummy, and that you were just like anybody else, and everything went along fine.

It is clear that Mr. Millican viewed dealing with student behavior, including their attitudes, as a part of his job. His responsibility was to teach students. He approached this responsibility by working hard to prepare and deliver quality lessons.

The complex nature of attitudes and feelings about desegregation in the African American community in Baton Rouge is evident from many portions of Mr. Millican's interviews. Opinions and feelings were many and varied. When asked how friends and family members reacted to his being at Istrouma, Mr. Millican (1999a) said they were proud.

> Oh, man, they were proud. They have always been proud of us. They have always been proud of us as teachers, and I was proud to say that I taught at Istrouma. And they were proud to have a brother, a son, whatever teaching school at one of the White schools. So we were proud to go back in the community and people would say, "Hey, where are you teaching?" And I would say, "Istrouma High." And they would smile. So we were proud of Broadmoor and Istrouma and Tara. And of course, the people looked upon us as being pioneers and saying that we were succeeding. We were making that cross-over. We were succeeding at it. We received a pat on the back from the people. Nobody looked down at you or said anything.

Clearly, from Mr. Millican's perspective, the African American community in Baton Rouge was supportive of the cross-over teachers regardless of their misgivings about some of the details of the desegregation policy.

For Mr. Millican, one of the problems of making desegregation work was that along with the positive benefits of the cross-over, the policy had many negative effects. An example

provided by Mr. Millican (1999b) contrast the benefits of better materials and facilities to the loss of African American schools:

> There are some drawbacks to integration. There are some down sides to it. For example, like I told you when we first started, I graduated from Northwestern High School, and there is no more Northwestern High School -- just Northwestern Middle School -- which means that I don't have an alma matter. There is no more Channeyville High School where most of the Black people around my age graduated back then. There is no more Channeyville. There is no more Scotlandville Hornets. We lost our alma maters. Many of the other people didn't. They didn't lose their's. They still can call Broadmoor, Baton Rouge High, and Istrouma, even though Istrouma is ninety percent Black now. They still have an alma mater. But of course, I don't have an alma mater -- many people don't. You go all across Louisiana. They closed the Black school, and the Black kids went to the White school. That was one downside of it. But then, the plus side of it was that many of these school buildings were not great architecturally strong buildings anyway. They were not built like Istrouma High and Baton Rouge High. They were not built to last fifty or seventy-five years. So, these kids went to a better school. You know, we used to pass by Istrouma High School with its huge gymnasium and its huge track and its big old auditorium and its tennis courts and basketball courts and just a massive building compared to what I went to high school in. These people had better conditions than we had. They had better schools. They had better books. They had more paper. They had just better everything in the White schools. You know the old saying, "Separate but equal"? Remember that? There is no such thing as separate but equal. It was not equal. It was separate, but it was not equal. And we found that when we went over that Istrouma High had way more than McKinley had in terms of material to work with. Yeah, in terms of resources, they had more. Bigger and better schools, more books, more paper, more pencils, more everything than we had in the Black schools. So, integration has its downside, and it has its good side. And I think overall the good outweighs the bad. That is what I personally believe.

The impact of the loss of a school on an individual and community is strongly felt by Mr. Millican. The high school he graduated from no longer exists. Something from his past has been taken, yet, he strongly believes the cross-over was worth the price.

Mr. Millican also discusses the impact of the cross-over on students. It is here, as reflected by Mr. Millican (1999b), that many African Americans believe the highest cost of

desegregation has been payed. However, he makes it clear that he still believes desegregation is worth while.

> I am sure that when White people get together, they talk about integration. We Black people, when we get together, we talk about integration. Often times people talk about the negative impact of integration in Baton Rouge. Many people say that when we as teachers, when we had control of the Black kid, when we had control of his mind at a school like McKinley or a school like Northwestern, or a school like Capitol, when we had a captive audience with those Black children, that we taught them. It was a consensus among us that we taught them hard and that we told them that they had to run twice as fast to get ahead or to keep up with the White boy. We figured that we were doing a great job with them. Some kind of way, when integration came along, we lost them. That we lost them to the White teacher, and that some people say that is one of the reasons that some of our kids are going astray, because they don't have that caring and nurturing that we used to give them when we would have them in the Black schools. But, we talk about that. But then, there could be some truth to that. That because we had them in this situation and we knew what the world was like and could train them and make them aware that they had to run twice as hard in the American society. But then, in me personally looking back, I had to look at the positive aspects of integration. And I really believe that it has been best. It's a good thing for the kids because we got a chance to go to better schools, we got a chance to go to meet, in some cases, better teachers, we got a chance to learn things about the culture of the White man that there is no way you could learn in a Black school. Take a person like me who went to a Black high school, who went to a Black university, and who never had any association with White people -- coming up having gone to school twelve years at a Black school, four years at a Black college, you know -- so when a kid comes up now days, he gets a chance to rub shoulders with the White boy and learn about his culture and learn about his expectations. And many of the good things that White people have to offer can rub off on the Black boy. And vise versa, many of the good things about the Black culture can rub off on the White boy.

These benefits are powerfully expressed as Mr. Millican (1999b) notes:

> I have seen it evolve now where I see these kids. Now, for example in 1999, I see them, they are hugging and talking just like brothers and sisters. And I can remember when they didn't even look at each other. So you got to look at the progress of the whole thing, and it has got to be good.

It is evident that Mr. Millican is aware of the high cost of school desegregation in East Baton Rouge, especially for the African American community. After all the years, however, he is left with a positive feeling.

Freddie Millican responded to a final question on his overall impression of the efforts to desegregate and integrate the East Baton Rouge School System. His response was filled with optimism. For Mr. Millican, a key ingredient is time. He has seen racial attitudes in the community change, and he believes that with more time they will further improve. While the original goals have not been obtained, much has been accomplished:

> Ideally we are not where we thought we thought we'd be in thirty years. We are not where we thought we'd be; but, I think they have made progress in terms of the mixing of the races and integration. I think it is just going to take time. I think that time is the only thing that is going to take care of this. Like I was just saying, if you look back from 1970, if you take the progress that we have made from 1970 to 1999, and if everybody would just write it down and look at the positive aspects of the progress that we have made, then I think we have made good progress. Then you take thirty years from today and look at it again. It takes a long time for things like this to happen; and I think that, going back to the neighborhood school, going back to where the Blacks go to their schools and the Whites go to their schools, that is not going to get it. I think that they need to continue to work for some kind of way to get the two cultures together where they can work out their problems. It's going to take a lot of work, and it's going to take a little of giving by the Black people and lot of giving by the White people. I think it is going to work. But, looking back, I think we have made progress. (Millican, 1999b)

Mr. Millican's optimistic view and call for patience and time are his own. Certainly, his thinking is not unique or unusual; but, there are also many distinctly different perceptions of desegregation and the cross-over, and the meaning of these events. In the historically African American Capitol High School, located a little more than a mile from where Mr. Millican taught at Istrouma High School, a young White teacher began her public teaching career at the time of the 1970 cross-over. Many of her comments and thoughts about school desegregation and the cross-over are similar to Mr. Millican's. Yet, there are also many interesting and revealing differences.

Helen Haw

Ms. Helen Haw had one year of private school teaching experience when she became a White cross-over teacher at Capitol High School in 1970. The year before, she taught in a Catholic school after receiving a B.S. in Education from LSU in 1969. Ms. Haw was not raised in the South, but rather grew up in the Midwest and moved with her parents to Central Louisiana from Chicago in 1963. After finishing two years of college at LSU-Alexandria, Ms. Haw married and came to LSU in Baton Rouge to finish her undergraduate education.

Ms. Haw's reasons for choosing education as a career were also influenced by social norms. In the case of Ms. Haw, the limitations were a result of gender. She explains:

> I am of that era where little girls had two choices: they could be a nurse or they could become a teacher. Since I hate blood, I went to the option of being a teacher. So not knowing that really I would enjoy it, I went ahead and entered LSU anticipating that I would come out a teacher, which I did. (Haw, 1998)

Ms. Haw knew that she would be a cross-over teacher when she applied and accepted a social studies teaching position at Capitol High School.

When asked about the selection of cross-over teachers, Ms. Haw (1998) answered with a set of practical reasons:

> The people at the school board just told those of us who were being newly hired that we would be going to predominantly Black schools because we were the new hires. From what I could gather, they were afraid to try and send any of their tenured teachers to Black schools because they would just quit. The older, more experienced teachers, they were entrenched in the system. They had a job. They had tenure. They were either going to fight it, or quit. They didn't want to lose some of their better, more experienced, White teachers. We were told that if we stayed in Black schools for three years, that at the end of three years, we could request a transfer. Many went in with the idea that you could stand anything for three years. I talked to Black teachers who were in the cross-over and their comments were that they sent them because they felt that they had been teaching longer and they were better able to handle – it was sort of like almost a compliment to them that, "You can do this. You're our elite."

This statement supports Mr. Millican's opinion that many people in the African American community felt their schools were being robbed of their best teachers. Capitol High School, when Ms. Haw began to teacher there, was a vital educational institution for the African American community it Baton Rouge.

Capitol High School was the second African American High School built inside the city limits of Baton Rouge. The school is located in sight of the Louisiana State Capital Building near downtown Baton Rouge. The campus Ms. Haw taught at in 1970, which is still in use today, was designed by the famous Louisiana architect, A. Hayes Towne. The school is set upon a spacious campus. Several buildings with outward facing classrooms, open courtyards, and covered walkways occupy the site. The school also has a large auditorium, a large gymnasium, several athletic fields, and a track. Because of its location in the middle of an African American neighborhood, Capitol High School has never been able to attract more than a few White students. Following the 1970 cross-over, however, it has had a large percentage of White teachers.

Ms. Haw was one of the first White teachers at Capitol High School. Ms. Haw (1998) recalls that when she began teaching at the school, there were two White agriculture teachers who had taught there during previous years. Ms. Haw taught at Capitol High School for ten years before taking a leave to raise a family. She returned to the school system as a social studies teacher at Istrouma High School in 1994. She is still excited and enthusiastic about teaching at Istrouma High School and working with inner-city students.

When Ms. Haw was assigned to Capitol, she did not know how long she would stay. Ms. Haw (1998) remembers that the new White teachers were given a carrot to entice them to work in

African American schools. "We had been promised, kind of quietly, that if you served your first three years, that they would let you out and send you to a 'good school'." When asked what she and other White teacher felt before crossing over to Capital High School, Ms. Haw (1998) expresses mixed feelings:

> I was excited. I thought, man this is a chance, and I really thought I could make it work at the time. Some of my co-workers were bewildered, some were as eager as I; some were naive. I had never really talked with or dealt with Blacks in depth except our maid to be honest because I am from the North, and you didn't associate with Blacks. You never had a reason or an opportunity unless they worked for you. And then, others of the teachers who crossed-over were scared.

This statement was followed with a question about the number of White teachers crossing over who resigned because of fear or stress. Ms. Haw remembers that most made it through the first year and many more stayed for three years and transferred. Regardless of what the other White cross-over teachers did, Ms. Haw did not mention, during her interviews, ever requesting a transfer or even desiring to leave Capitol High.

Ms. Haw recalls that, unlike some of the White cross-over teachers, she was not afraid. For Ms. Hall (1998), she didn't know what to expect because she remembers little prior contact with African Americans: "The first time I ever came into contact with any Blacks at all was the year began in 1970 working at Capitol High." This statement was followed with a question on the level of her preparation in the College of Education at LSU for teaching in a racially integrated classroom. Ms. Haw (1998) replied that, "We never talked about that at all. We never dreamed it would happen. It was never a topic of conversation." The only preparation Ms. Haw was given to prepare her for entering a multicultural environment was the seminar for cross-over teachers at LSU prior to the 1970 school year.

With few preconceived notions and expectations, Ms. Haw began her cross-over job. Her open attitude result in a memorable incident during her first few days. Recalling the event with humor, Ms. Haw (1999) tells the story of a encounter involving Capitol's Principal, Charles Keel, and several students:

> We had just been in school a few days and, of course, being totally naive and not understanding why everybody was half scared to death, I got some of the young men to go to the book-room with me. I looked around the room, and I picked out the biggest, strongest guys. I had about six of them in tow and was walking to the book-room with them straggling behind me, and Mr. Charles Keel, who was principal at the time, looked up and saw me up on the balcony and started hollering out there: "Miss Haw, what's wrong? Is there something I can do for you? What's wrong?" And I said, "No, we are just going to the book-room to get some books." And he goes, "Oh, Ok." He later told me that he was terrified and he had no idea what was going on because I had six of the worst thugs trailing behind me that the school had, and he thought I was having problems.

For Ms. Haw, her attitude was a key to her ability to work with the students at Capitol High School. This narrative also indicates her perception of her treatment by the school's leadership.

Ms. Haw remembers the administration as openly supportive and never intimidating. Rather than the thinly veiled hostility encounter by Freddie Millican at Istrouma, Helen Haw (1998) remembers that, "They were glad to have us." When asked about the African American Principal at Capitol High School when she began there, Ms. Haw (1999) smiled, and fondly reminisced with the following:

> I have nothing but the greatest admiration and respect for my former principal. Charles W. Keel was one of the greatest men to work for as a new teacher I have ever met. He was there to lend support and help. But when he found out you were doing your job and could do it, he left you alone to do what you needed to do. I was an advocate for the students quite frankly, and often I would go to him to talk about the child who was in trouble. And a lot of times he would back me and give that kid a second chance because he really believed in students and their right to learn. He would often tell us "you are teaching children, not a subject." And I have kept that in mind. I don't teach civics or American History, I teach kids.

From Ms. Haw's account of the interaction between White cross-over teachers and African American students, many of the most difficult element of the cross-over faced by the teachers are revealed. On several occasions Ms. Haw mentions the high level of fear of the African American students among the White teachers. For example, the act of being touched was often misunderstood.

> Some of the White teachers were afraid, and the kids would try and touch them and that scared the daylights out of some of the White teachers. But when you stopped to find out why they were touching you, it was because many of them had never been around a White person before; and they didn't know what our skin felt like; and they hadn't a clue what our hair felt like. So they would sneak up behind us and touch our hair. And it wasn't because they were trying to harm us, but because to them we were exotic. And so they just wanted to know what we were like. (Haw, 1999)

Remarkably, it appears from this passage, that much of the fear was a result of lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge of other cultures that existed in the same city.

While teachers are remembered as having problems in this area, Mr. Haw initiated physical contact with students as an expression of her own will and confidence. Ms. Haw (1998) recounts one particular incident that seems to have earned her respect.

> I wasn't afraid, so I didn't act as though I were afraid. I didn't have any trouble and that kind of blew people's minds. Of course, I have a bad temper, and if anyone decided they didn't want to do what I wanted, then I am not the nicest person in the world. They tell me I have "the look", ha, ha. So I got away with a lot with those guys because I didn't have enough sense to be afraid. I remember one kid coming in and telling me -- he walked in and he wouldn't take off his hat; he didn't have a pen; he didn't have a pencil; didn't have paper; and he wasn't going to do his work. So, I got so mad I grabbed him by the arm, and I tossed him out of the room. And, of course, everybody was shocked that I would do something like that because you just didn't do that to a student.

There is an indication here that Ms. Haw understood the need to be strong in the presence of students. This strong will combined with a strong commitment to students is evident throughout her narrative.

One expression of her commitment to students was the method Ms. Haw recounts using to motivate some of the students to learn. Like students in schools everywhere, there were some students at Capitol High School who took advantage of stereotypes on the part of White teachers to avoid difficult work. Ms. Haw (1998) talks about how she handled this problem:

> Sometimes the kids would try to "Uncle Tom it" or act dumb -- put on the face -- if you will a facade that they were dumb, and they really were not. But, it was working in some of the classrooms. Some of the White teachers were pretty naive as to their ability, so that if they were in math they would act like they couldn't add or subtract so they would have to start all over. They were young enough so that they didn't realize that they were hurting themselves but old enough to realize that they could put a con over on their teachers. So I would always try and find out who could read because we had some reading problems. A majority of them could read. So when a kid would come up to my desk to read and say he couldn't read, I would say, "OK, that is fine." I had already arranged it with Mr. Keel, and I would write a note saying, "Mr. Keel, please remove this student from my class and put him in some type of remediation as he claims that he cannot read. Sincerely, Mrs. Haw." And I would fold it over and hand it to the student and tell him to take it to the office. Generally, he would get about half way down the steps, and having read the note, then come back and read to me. The few who made it all of the way down the steps, I knew they really couldn't read because they would cheerfully carry it to the office. And when Mr. Keel would get it, he knew what I was doing. So, you had kids who would try and get over -- try and act like they couldn't do the work -- lazy.

Other teachers are remembered as not being as perceptive.

When teachers came into the school with preconceived attitudes and perceptions, their ability to be productive with students was severely limited. This combined with the efforts of some students had severe consequences:

> A lot of them were frustrated because they bought into that story of the kids not knowing anything. It is a self fulfilling prophecy. They thought the kids were dumb, they taught them on a low level, the kids didn't really achieve much, so they didn't see much success. There wasn't sense of fulfillment. It was like, "We are never going to change these people. I just want to get out of here." They did their time and got out. (Haw, 1999)

Ms. Haw makes it clear that all of the students were not trying to avoid work. Ms. Haw (1999) counters her comments on motivating students with a comment on the many students who were

motivated: "Of course, you had the other group that just desperately wanted an education and desperately wanted a chance to be someone, to achieve, to want to learn. You couldn't give them enough information."

Sometimes students resisted her efforts more forcefully and Ms. Haw (1999) needed to take a stronger stand. Ms. Haw recalls with pride one such stand. For her, it was the type of moment that made all of her efforts worthwhile:

> One kid, the first year I was there, I tried to get him to read, and he got angry and kicked the chair and told me no and walked out. About a week after that, he caused some trouble in one of the White teachers' classes, and they found out he was twenty-one. And so they expelled him. And the last thing he did was he came back to my class and to my room and in front of all of the other students he picked up the textbook and he read out loud. He turned around to the classroom and said, "Mrs. Haw, I have been expelled, but I wanted you to know I could read." He turned to the class and said, "She is here to help you, listen to her," and walked out of the room. So there were the moments that made you want to stay.

Ms. Haw is and was not a 8:00 to 3:00 teacher. For her, succeeding at Capitol High School, required being accepted as a member of the broader community from which the students came To this end, Ms. Haw spent long hours at the school, in the neighborhood and in the community. She volunteered to chaperon many school outings and functions. She also served as a faculty advisor for the Girls dance teem and Girls Auxiliary of ROTC. These activities effected Ms. Haw's relationship with other teachers at the school

When asked about her relationship with other teachers, Ms. Haw recalls a variety of attitudes and feelings. When asked about other teachers, Ms. Haw (1998) becomes quiet. Her lengthy reply is somber and sad:

> Those were difficult times. They were very difficult times. At first the Black teachers were fairly receptive. Every now and then someone would let slip, "Well you took John's place." "When John was here," and that type of thing because they missed their co-

workers. They didn't mind my being there, but they resented the fact that one of their own had to go for me to be there. Mainly, they were cordial but distant -- afraid to be hurt. As I became closer to them and worked more with them and was willing to go out into the community and was willing to chaperone events at school and all, I became very friendly and still maintain some very warm friendships with some of those people who were there. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for all of the White teachers I worked with because the ones who were against integration and didn't want it to work, and there were some, did not like the fact that I was doing my job regardless of what color the students were. They did not want to chaperon, they did not want to be involved with sporting events, they did not want to be in community at night, so they resented my doing it because it made them look incompetent, basically. So, I lost some potential friends along those lines. I didn't really care. There were a couple of us who were doing what we should, and we hung together. And we hung out with the Black teachers and ourselves. As time went on, racial tension got to be a little bit more prevalent among the faculty. And the lounge would be -- we would all use the same lounge, but there was the Black side and the White side. It was kind of inconvenient because if you wanted to talk to somebody on the Black side, everybody looked at you when you went and sat over there. And woe be it for any Black to come sit on the White side. Everyone was cordial to each other, but there was no friendship; there was no intermingling; no mixing among faculty members the way you see today. And finally, one of my best friends who was also White and another girl and I took the work table and put it in the middle of the room and put chairs around it and got a couple of Black teachers, and we would all sit at the work table in the middle of the room. We did things like that. We would rearrange the furniture so that it would make it uncomfortable for everyone to try and separate. But, finally, we just sort of gave up because there was not much you could do to change certain people.

Later, during the second interview, the topic came up again. Once again, Ms. Haw's description reflects change followed by feelings of futility. It is almost as if those teachers trying to break social barriers gave up:

> It was a strange situation because some of us got along well from the very beginning. We even partied together. We'd go out on Friday afternoons for drinks or we would meet at one of the Black teachers, a single guys, house. Our spouses would meet us and we'd have an evening of drinking and talking and dancing. Just in general enjoying each other company. Then at work at lot of times there was that reserve again. No you find that we rarely associate socially, but it's almost as though that sense we know that barrier is there socially and no one's necessarily trying to climb it, we work well together professionally. I have no problem going to ask for help or suggesting something to one of my African American colleges and they seem to have no hesitation in coming to me. We work well together. Socially, quite frankly, I rarely socialize with any of my fellow teachers. I don't

> frequent the lounge at all. So, I really don't know what's going on along those lines. A couple of times I have been to one of the teacher's houses here and occasionally a Black teacher will drop in. But, it's not a big issue one way or the other. It's just seems that socially no one is making an effort. (Haw, 1999)

In the end, like Freddie Millican, Helen Haw describes a situation that indicates professional desegregation at school without personal social integration outside of the school. Unlike, Mr. Millican, Ms. Haw's description of her own family and community's reaction to her crossing over to teach at Capitol High School is not supportive.

Mr. Millican remembered a large amount of pride within his own family and community that he was teaching at Istrouma High School. In contrast, Ms. Haw (1998) responded to this topic with a series of questions she was commonly asked:

> "You're going where?" "You're doing what?" "Are you going to be safe?" "Is it dirty?" "Does it stink?" "Do you wash your clothes every night as soon as you come home in Clorox?" "What do you mean you drink after them, and do you use the same glasses, and cups, and plates?" Those were the questions that I got.

When asked how she responded to these questions, Ms. Haw (1998) laughed and said, "I would tell them that it is the same as anywhere else -- probably cleaner and no smell, and no I did not wash my clothes in Clorox, there was not anything I was going to catch."

Ms. Haw (1999) discussed this topic later with a much more serious tone. Rather than pride in her, she remembers family members being ashamed:

> My family was ashamed of me. They felt that I wasn't making the grade as a teacher. Because if I was a good teacher, why would I stay there. They would frequently ask me why I hadn't gotten a transfer? Was I going to ask for one? What was the matter, couldn't I get one? They didn't tell people where I taught. Sometimes I felt ashamed, too. Because, they made you feel as though you were a second class teacher.

This is one of several occasions during the interviews when Ms. Haw expresses feelings of isolation and being alone. Ms. Haw, however, balances these feelings with positive thoughts about her relationship with the people in her students' neighborhoods and community.

When asked to describe the results or possible benefits of desegregation in East Baton Rouge Parish, Ms. Haw (1999) is not encouraged with the progress and concerned for the future. For her, public school integration is something the people do not want.

> It didn't work. It is still not working. We are sitting here in a magnet school that was designed to entice White students, and we have got maybe twenty-five White students, or non-Black as they put it because we are so grateful when an Asian walks in the door that we can count them as a non-Black that is part of our percentage. So, I'm sitting here watching it, and I don't think that it is working. And I think it is because the majority of the people power don't want it to work.

This statement was followed with a question on what she believed might have been done differently to make school integration work. Ms. Haw's (1999) answer calls for the changing of attitudes, leadership, and support from the media. In the end, however, she is pessimistic.

> Same thing that could still be done. We still need cultural diversity education. I don't want to say multi-culturalism because that has almost become synonymous with not doing anything now days. I think we need more education as to the diversity and to the differences among cultures so that we can understand when we are offending someone or why they react the way that they do. I don't think that it is just a Black-White thing; I think we need it for the Asians. Two years ago when our superintendent had his mass meeting, he pointed to it eloquently by what he didn't say. Because he talked about the need for multi-cultural education. He immediately then said Black and White. He never said a word about the Islamic students we have, never said a word about the Asian students we have, never said a word about the Hispanic students we have. He broke it down into only Black and into White, and it's not that -- it's not just that. And when our own superintendent of education is not aware of the cultural diversity of the community, then it shows we need re-education. I also think we need a more positive attitude from the media, who are quick to be here pointing cameras when something goes wrong at a Black school and are equally quick to hide some of the things that go on at quote, "the White schools" that are just as bad, but they don't play them up. Again, the corporate executives who make sure that their new people don't put their kids into our schools.

> This whole attitude -- I don't think the South is now, was not in the '70's, nor ever will be ready for integration.

The interviewer was reluctant to accept a complete lack of hope and probed further:

> Well, you have got to go back to the old saw: "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." I think as long as there are cultural differences between Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Asians and all of the other nationalities, I don't think you can force people to accept each other until you educate them to the differences. And we are not doing that. I think we really have to look at what multi-culturalism is and means. And I think you have to start small. I don't think you can legislate who people are going to like I think that you would have to provide a really safe haven on a small basis of voluntary integration. Maybe one school with your best teachers that you can possibly find. And if need be, pay them more. And get willing parents who are committed to the belief, who are committed to making it work, and set up one model school and make it work. (Haw, 1999)

Unfortunately, Ms. Haw is clearly aware of the legal and political restrictions to her type of solution.

Regardless of this dim ray of hope, Ms. Haw concludes her thoughts along two themes, one of personal gratitude and appreciation of her experience and the other of deep concern for the future. In speaking of the impact on her own life, Ms. Haw (1999) says:

> The cross-over totally changed my life. It totally changed my ambitions and my aspirations. I tried to go back to being, thinking all White, and I have never been able too. I have gone and taught private schools and Catholic schools, and I remember the crying need of these kids out here and then how grateful the ones who make it are when they do as compared to the "world owes me a living attitude of the White kids." And the desire to teach someone and make a difference in their lives constantly draws me back to inner-city schools.

For the future of education, little hope is offered:

> I am worried about the future of education in East Baton Rouge Parish. I don't see any ray of sunshine in the foreseeable future because the adults are so busy arguing that they are not giving the educators the chance to educate the leaders of tomorrow. Until people can go, "Enough is enough, let's just get on about the business of education," I don't see much changing here. We are all going to lose because the very people who are spending the most time arguing, are soon going to be the elderly and they are going to be the most

> susceptible to the damage that we have done to our young people educationally. These very young people that are being hurt with all of this are going to be the ones that are taking care of us in our old age. (Haw, 1999)

During both interviews with Ms. Haw in her classroom at Istrouma High School, there were interruptions by students seeking help with school, advice or information from Ms. Haw. The relationship between Helen Haw and her students was clearly evident.

Conclusion

Remembering Terkel's (1992) claim that oral history is an art. The attempt has been made in this paper to allow the voice of the narrative, the individual's personal story, to be clearly and accurately expressed. These narratives are full of meaning on their own. Yet, they were also acquired with a specific set of questions in mind.

The Perceptions of Teachers During the Cross-Over

The first research question asks: What were the perceptions of cross-over teachers regarding the process of desegregation and the 1970 cross-over? The two narratives collected are full of interesting perceptions. The problem here is the interpretation and the development of generalized conclusions. It is problematic to claim any conclusions based on the perceptions of others. Nevertheless, there is something to be learned from the narratives that is suitable for presentation and explanation.

An initial area of interest regarding perceptions is the attitudes of the two teachers regarding desegregation itself. Clearly, perceptions were often mixed. More is revealed about perceptions of the specific 1970 cross-over. Teachers were not given a choice because of the teacher transfer plan mandated by the courts. Many teachers, however, were glad to cross-over. Mr. Millican (1999a) clearly stated that many African American teachers were grateful for the

opportunity to cross-over because of what it meant for the overall civil rights struggle. Ms. Haw (1998) also indicated a desire to be part of the cross-over. On the other hand, both interviewees mentioned cross-over teachers who did not want to teach in a predominantly other race school.

Another, perhaps overly generalized, conclusion about perceptions of the cross-over is that it was difficult for the teachers. Again, both interviewees discuss cross-over teacher problems in one form or another. In particular, the problem of language stands out as a dominant theme. It was difficult for cross-over teachers to overlook racially charged language. It is easy to understand why teachers would resent being called "new teachers" by a principal just because they were Black.

The creation of cultural differences is legitimized through language. Often, the same language that separates groups, marginalizes groups. This claim is not meant to be academic or technical. To put it simply, people know when language is being used to put them down (marginalize them). When such language is used, anger and resentment are logical results. In the professional environment cross-over teachers experienced at school, however, there was little acceptable release. Teachers were expected to ignore the language and do their jobs. This along, indicates a difficult work environment for cross-over teachers.

The final relevant issue regarding the impressions of school personnel about desegregation and the crossover is the interviewees' current thoughts. Again, there is a wide range of thoughts. Both interviewees believed that desegregation has fallen far short of expectations. The interviewees all also believed that problems of desegregation remain in the district. Helen Haw (1999) believed that little has been accomplished through all of the desegregation efforts. Millican, (1999a, 1999b) said that desegregation in East Baton Rouge Parish had improved

overall race relations in the city. Both interviewees also expressed concern over the future of public schools in East Baton Rouge Parish; however, Mr. Millican (1999a, 1999b) also discussed reasons for optimism. Shifting from a focus on impressions, the second research question addresses the issue of the impact of the cross-over on instruction.

Impact of the Cross-Over on Teaching and Learning

The second research question asks: How did the 1970 cross-over in impact teaching and learning? Comments throughout both narratives provide many interesting perspectives on this question. Again, because of only two sources, there is no attempt here to generalize these answers to a broader context. It is asserted, however, that what is claimed through this interpretation of narrative is reflective of types of situations and experiences faced by cross-over teachers in the classroom.

In many cases, it appears that teachers worked harder in the classroom. Mr. Millican described on several occasions the extra effort he and other African American cross-over teachers placed on the preparation and delivery of their lessons. The discussion by Mr. Millican (1999a) concerning the way the students would challenge him, his concern over using incorrect grammar on any written document, his telling about the teacher removed from the school for speaking incorrectly, all indicate a situation where he perceived that the White community was monitoring everything he did. To use Mr. Millican's (1999a) own words, "There might be some truth to that." It is reasonable to assume that many African American teachers in predominantly White schools did perceive that they were being carefully watched; and, as a result, that they worked hard in an effort to prove themselves good teachers. What is not determinable from the methods

used in this study, is the level of this perception among African American cross-over teachers, or the overall amount of extra performance it motivated.

Changes in the cultures of predominantly African American schools following the arrival of White cross-over teachers appears to have been different. Ms. Haw (1998) discussed the lack of expectations from Black students resulting from preconceived notions on the part of many White teachers. This practice is elaborated by Delpit (1995) through her discussion of "child deficit belief." Like the situation in the White schools, the level of "child deficit belief" existing among White cross-over teachers is impossible to determine from the methods of this study. Regardless, the explanation articulated through Helen Haw's (1998) narrative makes sense.

Ms. Haw (1998, 1999) briefly raised other issues that may have, to some degree or another, influenced the classroom instruction of White cross-over teachers. Ms. Haw (1998) mentioned a high level of fear. Certainly, it is difficult to perform any job when one is afraid. A lack of commitment from White cross-over teachers to their school and their children is also a concern. Ms. Haw (1998) mentioned teachers "putting in their time" so that they could transfer to a White school in three years. Further, Ms. Haw (1998) stated that many cross-over teachers did not want to participate in any school activities beyond the normal eight to three school day. These type of attitudes may not have a direct impact on instruction; however, students are highly perceptive of a teacher's attitude and respond accordingly.

In hindsight, the second question is the most difficult to answer given the methods employed in this research. To definitively answer this type of question would require a different set of assumptions including objectivity and neutrality. At a minimum it would require a much larger sample of cross-over teachers and standardized procedure for either quantitative or

qualitative data analysis. Nevertheless, the above interpretations do provide some understanding of the types of changes in classroom instruction that resulted from the cross-over. Further, there is enough support for these claims to suggest that policy decisions that change cultural relationships in school classrooms also impact instruction in those classrooms. The changes, however, are not necessarily negative or counter productive to learning; although, in many cases, learning may be reduced.

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